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PHILISTINISM IN ART & ARTHUR HOEBER



HAT the mills of the gods of art grind slowly, may at once be admitted ; that they grind exceeding fine, is not so evident a proposition.

But in the changes of the past quarter-century, there is much food for thankfulness; there have been, here and there, modest blessings vouchsafed us, with occasional bright spots to illumine the darkness of ignorance, bad taste and prejudice, three wretched traits, so hopeless to combat, so difficult to overcome.

American notions of art grow with great deliberation. The national aesthetic brain works sluggishly. We are a progressive people in most things, save in the fine arts. Though even in this direction we make advances, there now and then comes a rude shock that makes one pause and ask seriously if ideas of good taste and artistic fitness have really penetrated to any depth.

The parks, the public squares of our cities and our national capitols, do not lack for examples of inefficient judgment in matters artistic, while the records are full of scandals, of jobs pushed through by favoritism, of orders to incompetent foreigners, or natives with influence, when, by a display of ordinary intelligence, the fate might have been averted.

An event such as the recent criminal disregard for the first principles of art, shown by the action of the committee of the Army of the Tennessee, in the matter of the Sherman statue, is enough to discourage the most hopeful optimist and set back the cause of art progress many years.

What shall be said, when the judgment of half a dozen of our best sculptors, fitted by training, study and experience to pass on the work, is ignored, and a number of military men, unable by all the laws of common sense to speak with equal intelligence on the subject, arrogate to themselves the privilege of selecting

chanted Forest and thus place him in the power of the Beast then Second Merchant can appear to the afflicted family and offer his heart and fortune to Beauty. Exit Second Merchant, Devil soliloquises—Song, "The Art of Being Kind." Enter Servant making love to Maid.





from the competitors the least worthy maker of a design that must stand for years as a monument to the committee's egotism and bad taste, a prominent, unsightly and inartistic example of the fatuity of our methods of bestowing commissions for public decoration?

It does not require a wide stretch of the imagination to conceive the howl of virtuous indignation that would go up from these sons of Mars, were a committee of architects appointed to inquire into the merits of a new invention in field pieces, or if a jury of sculptors should be designated to pass final judgment on a plan of sea-coast fortifications. And what would be the result, if the prerogatives of the Engineer Corps were invaded and a party of painters were called upon to render expert opinion in the matter of bridge construction? Obviously these conditions are no more absurd than that the discriminating estimate of practical, talented art workers should be ignored, where a statue is concerned.

The formation of the Society of American Artists some years ago, with a membership of young men full of talent and enthusiasm, had its effect in time on that older and more conservative body, the National Academy of Design. The veterans in the latter association were aroused from their lethargy, and beginning soon to realize that something must be done, gradually admitted within their circle some of the element that for years had passed by unnoticed. But the effort was sporadic after all. The bright men, with rare exceptions, have knocked in vain at the doors; and though there have been hung at the exhibitions modern departures, that would make some of the dead and gone members almost turn in their graves, and that doubtless send many a cold shiver down the backs of present N. A.'s. their authors remain without official endorsement. And to cap it all, at the last meeting of this body artistic, such was the extraordinary combination of prejudice and imbecility, though there

Devil also makes love to Maid. Servant becomes jealous of Devil—they fight—during scuffle Servant gets possession of a key which was suspended about neck of Devil. Maid calls for help.

were several vacancies for associates and members, and with no less distinguished an American than John Sargent waiting for recognition, only one painter received enough votes to admit him into this remarkable organization, misnamed "National."

Here then, are two incidents giving important evidence of the fact that the Philistine is still with us; and though he is so deep-rooted that we may never hope to quite exterminate him in our civilization, it is unfortunate that he should be so placed as to be capable of working much harm.

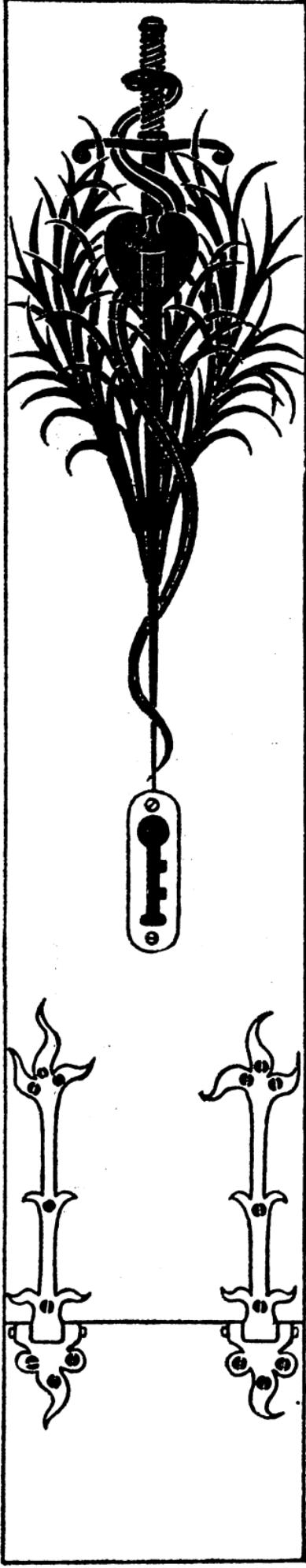
But the worst of it all is, that a certain class of public opinion is moulded by just such official acts. There is a great mass of the people, who, having no judgment of their own, go to what they suppose to be the fountain head for their information; and if they see a statue, bearing the official seal of the approval of the government, they straightway take it as gospel proof of excellence and are accordingly impressed. "This," they argue, "must be good, for have not the wise minds of a nation concurred in its erection?" So they fancy the protestations of a few sculptors are the jealous contumely of the disappointed, while for the unfortunates who are neglected in the matter of Academic honors, they have scant patience and less pity, and in the end, there arises a suspicion that the whole guild is composed, more or less, of cranks.

Thus the harm is wrought in many ways and the native worker, already handicapped by the absence of national pride among the connoisseurs, lack of appreciation and the technical difficulties of his profession, suffers more than ever.

For all this the remedy is somewhat difficult to prescribe. To begin with, however, a national committee of experts is an imperative necessity, where public commissions are concerned. Wise legislation, if such be possible, should provide for a board of men, fitted to make intelligent, unbiased selection, to discriminate

Enter squad of Town Police—Devil transforms his costume into one similar to that worn by Police. Servant is taken into custody by Police. Exit Singing.





in an enlightened manner, to the end that the government shall receive honest, artistic returns for money expended, and that our public places should thus cease to become the dumping grounds for aesthetic incompetency.

As to the National Academy, no man may say what shall be done there. The narrow methods, the utter indifference to progress and the selfishness of its policy, are beyond the pale of dispassionate criticism. Of course, since the world began, power has brought conservatism. Conservatism however that refuses the mild honor of full membership in its body to the most distinguished American painter of the last half of the nineteenth century, one who has been exalted by nearly every other governmental art body but his own, is so irremediable as to be hopeless.

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

A Friend would have us own a thousand Friends, Nor seek a single star's bright glow to dim ; But Love for selfish mastery contends And bids us have no other love but him.

A VISION & J. D. W.



E had journeyed far to gaze upon the monument raised by a grateful people to commemorate the noble deeds of their hero.

Now, as he neared it in the dusk of evening, he paused to lift his eyes upward from the base of the hill on which it stood, to where its lofty column pierced the sky.

As he paused he heard the sound of many voices raised in angry discord, wrangling shouts and jeers filled the air, and he saw a brawling crowd assaulting their god!

It lay, a dreadful and monstrous creature in the similitude of a huge tortoise, upon a platform slightly raised above the earth at one side of the monument.

At first the stranger thought it but the representation of their god, carved in stone,

SCENE II. A wierd dungeon—continuation of song heard outside. Enter Servant in dazed condition—notices door, and with key attempts to open same.